Welcome Address

by

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SECRETARY GENERAL
NADWATUL ULAMA
LUCKNOW

at the Opening Session of the

85th Anniversary Celebration

held on

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In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Praise be to Allah and Peace and Blessings to Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah.

Respected President, honoured Delegates, distinguished Guests and Friends and Sympathisers.

I greet you all on behalf of the Nadwatul ʿUlamā and extend to you a most cordial welcome to this historic Conference on my own behalf as well as on behalf of the *ʿUlamā* of this country. I make salutation to the delegates and visitors from abroad, again, in the name of Islam and scholarship. This is the salutation of the junior partners to their senior and more experienced comrades, for, are we all not fellow travellers in the moving, advancing caravan of Islam ? We greet you also in the name of knowledge because we all seek to spread the light and learning of Islam. We occupy, no doubt, varying positions in this caravan of knowledge as teachers and pupils, old and young and the original and the duplicate but like the pearls of a String we are all bound together by the sacred string of Islam. We are what the Islam has made us and all of us are seekers of light and wisdom from the Holy Book of God. In short, we are learners and students, belonging to different grades and standards but of the same seminary whose philosopher, teacher and guide is Muhammad, the Blessed Messenger of God (on whom be peace and blessings of Allah).

I welcome you with a warm heart to this country which has had the opportunity of making a novel experiment in the

field of religion and culture. And this was an exceptionally sucessful experiment too. When Islam made its advent in this land, it also brought with it culture and learning, arts and knowledge as well as a way of life which transcends all barriers of caste and creed, culture, language, race and country. It was soon evident to everyone that Islam had a latent power which brought about an efflorescence of spirits and intellect and energised the dormant capabilities of different nationalities. It furnished not only a testimony to the compatibility of human nature and its propensities with the *Din-i-Fitrat* or the Way of God, but also showed how enthusiastically the latter welcomed the Straight Path of Islam. It demonstrated, on the one hand, the strength and vitality of Islam and, on the other, the receptive capacity or rather the fertility of the soil in which the seed of Islam was sown. At the same time, it afforded a proof that the sapling of Islamic teachings and learning could grow in every soil and every climate and could bring forth new blossoms no matter whether the land was strange and it was incised with the plant of an entirely different tradition and culture. This discovery was, indeed, of great significance for it set spurs to human endeavour. The strangeness of Islam in this country, far away from the land of its birth and cut off from the source of its spiritual sustenance, did not make its followers disheartened nor did they yield to despair about the future of Islam in India. On the contrary, their difficulties inspired new hopes and gave rise to new expectations in their hearts. Their confidence in the succour of God and their own competence to discharge the heavy responsibility devolving on them was an outcome of their firm belief that the land of their birth stood in need of the divine message vouchsafed to them. They deemed themselves to be the sentinels of Islam posted at the frontiers of the Islamic World. They cheerfully undertook this burdensome obligation because they were aware of the stimulating power possessed by Islam which could exhilarate and

enliven its followers, within an unbelievably short time, and could move them to accomplish feats of unbelievable valour which set at naught all the calculated counsels of cold logical thinking of the materialistic way of thought.

The tiny carvan of Islam thus entering this land and making India its homeland soon won the hearts of local population. The new-comers were recognised as loving brothers, benevolent teachers, merciful rulers, efficient administrators, adept craftsmen and learned scholars and savants who enriched this country with their cultural genius and pratical skill. The valour of the Turks, vaulting ambition of the Moghuls, stately pride of the Afghans, exquisite senstivity of the Iranians and the robust realism of the Arabs blended with the mild and pacific disposition of the dwellers of this great land through the integrative and moderating influence of Islam. These different streams of thought and impulsions, sometimes even contradictory to each other, brought together by the revolutionising faith of Islam's monotheistic creed and its impeccable sense of justice, unleashed not merely a tremendous upsurge of creative endeavour but also unfolded the hidden potentialities of different peoples which exhibited a variety of brilliant colours of light and shade. It was this happy accord of ideas and ideals, thought and action which could justifiably be called Indo-Islamic culture.

The new era into which India was ushered by Islam produced a distinctive school of thought and culture. It brought forth a large number of thinkers and scholars, sages and seers, master spirits of the age who founded new schools of thought. They were not only acknowledged as the shining light in religious disciplines like *Tafsīr*, *Hadīth* and *Fiqah* but also made their mark as authorities in Arabic literature and lexicography. Excellent and authoritative as their creations were in different branches of Islamic learning, some of them even today occupy a pride of place in the libraries of works on Islamic subjects.

This fresh centre of learning infused a new blood in the world of Islam which had had to suffer intellectual stupor in the 8th century A.H. as a result of the depredations of Mongol hordes. India then proved to be a stronghold for the preservation and propagation of several branches of Islamic learning. It became the greatest centre of teaching, radiating the light of *Hadīth* to the rest of the Islamic world. It gave birth to several giants of intellect who produced works of indisputable merit and undertook the great task of reinvigorating and revivifying the far off lands in the world of Islam. It seems, perhaps, the Providence had fore-ordained the great crisis of thought, culture and faith that this country had to pass through in the recent past. This was the conflict of Western materialism with the Islamic way of life, thought and values which has unfortunately been unduly prolonged into one of the most deadly struggles between two differing schools of thought by the cruel wheels of destiny.

The Muslims of India, defeated and still licking their wounds after the great uprising of 1857, found themselves, suddenly, face to face with a vigorous, ambitious civilization of the West which threatened to mow down every opposition. The heralds of this new civilization in India were bent upon wreaking vengeance upon Muslims, whom they considered as their inveterate enemies and leaders of the armed resistance of 1857. They treated Islam as the chief adversary of their way of thought and living. Thus, more than a struggle between two people, it developed into a conflict of ideas and ideals both of which laid a claim to provide guidance for human life and behaviour. Both wanted to shape the Indian society into their own mould. However, since the Muslims had been defeated in the first encounter, they were alive to the dangers lying ahead.

History, nevertheless, bears a witness to the fact that the Muslims of India proved themselves to be much more resolute and stout defenders of their faith, values and

individuality than many of their brethren who had to face the same menace during the closing decades of the 19th or in the beginning of the 20th century.

From the day Western domination stabilized itself in India, the Indian Muslims were laid open to another danger—the offensive launched out against them by the Christian Missionaries with such vigour that it threatened to conquer the whole of India for the faith of Christ. These ministers of the Gospel were not only armed with the latest weapons of knowledge and learning but also enjoyed official patronage. They regarded India as a patrimony bequeathed to them by the Lord, affording them a golden opportunity for spreading Christianity to the four corners of the country, and they were also bent upon taking full advantage of that favourable situation.

The Christian Missionaries, whose declared aim was to convert the whole country to their faith, started a powerful movement designed to discredit and create doubts about everything connected with Islamic creed, law, culture, history and literature in the minds of Muslim young men. At this critical juncture the Muslim *ʿUlamā* decided to take up the challenge and to hit back the aggressors instead of adopting a complacent or an apologetic attitude. The strategy of the Muslim religious scholars proved to be so successful that the growing menace of Christian evangelists was curbed in its offing imparting a sense of marvelous confidence in Islamic creed and values to the Muslims. The Muslims of India became, with this experience, even more determined to preserve their Islamic identity.

It was during this period that numerous Muslim young men went to England for receiving hjgher education. Many of them gained command over English language and literature and came back as proficient in expressing themselves in that language as the Englishmen themselves. Not a few of them earned the tribute of prominent

Englishmen for their learning and perspicacity but it was not unoften that these young men, well-groomed in Western thought and manners, returned as its rebels and critics. No other Muslim country can be compared to India in this respect. Similarly, very many Muslims who had never had an opportunity of visiting any European country learnt all about Western arts and sciences and then censored them so severely that it broke the magic spell of the modern Western civilization. Some of them took to skilful logical reasoning for refutation of the West's claim to supremacy while others preferred to ridicule and make fun of Western manners and modes of thought; nevertheless, both played an important role in demolishing the aura of forbidding superiority with which the Western thought, philosophy and cultural pattern had endued themselves. The more well-informed classes among the educated section of Indian Muslims presented Islam as a living faith which imparted conviction in the eternal nature of its message and reassured the modern educated class about the utility and immutability of Islamic faith and culture. A strong line of defence was thus erected by the Muslim scholars who rejected not only the West's leadership but also its claim to be above every weakness or shortcoming. Side by side, these master spirits of the age had an unwavering conviction in the universal, infallable nature of Islam and the finality of Muhammad's prophethood. They were so assured of the necessity of Muhammad's prophethood for the salvation of the entire human race and so enchanted by his loving personality that their feelings cannot perhaps be adequately expressed except through the poetic imagination of a ministrel singing the praise of the Last Prophet.

The Pathfinder, the Last Messenger of God, leader of all,
Who on the road-dust bestowed the splendour of Sinai.

The Muslim India had yet to undergo another experience at the time of its entry into a new and more important stage of its existence. This was the experience of living as a

self-respecting community in a free country for whose emancipation it had made immense sacrifices. This was the time when the sceptre of authority had been transferred from an alien power to the Indian nation, a new Constitution was being drafted and efforts were being made to remodel the social and educational structure of the country. It was at this time that communal frenzy took hold of certain sections of the Indian population. The Muslims, always pressed and trodden underfoot by the erstwhile foreign rulers, constituted a minority, socially and economically backward, which was also burdened with a legacy of distrust and doubt as to its integrity and love for the country owing to the turn of events in the recent past. Sometimes, even the happenings in a foreign land inflamed the feelings of enmity against the Muslims or they were blamed for the mistakes of their brethren over which they had no control. This was the critical situation in which Muslim India found itself placed at this crucial juncture of its life in this country.

Yet, setting at defiance every odd against them, the Muslims of India resolved, firmly, that they shall live in their motherland as self-respecting citizens of a free country, clinging to their creed and persisting in their separate Islamic identity. Now, by taking this decision the Indian Muslims have put to a severe test their intellectual genius, their unshaken faith in Islam, their genuine love for the country, their distinctive cultural identity, their creative talent and spirit, in short, everything for which they have lived and died in the past. This is an unprecedented challenge never encountered in the past by any section of the Muslim world—a challenge about which little guidance can be had from Islamic history or juristic thought of the bygone generations. Is there any instance of sixty million or more Muslims living amongst non-Muslims as a minority, under a parliamentary form of government regulated by a Constitution which declares secularism as its guiding principle ? Now, the only way for them to live honourably and

to play a positive, creative role compatible with their Islamic character is to draw light and guidance from the wise, eternal and universal principles of Islam and to implement them with their imaginative and creative talent, hard work and clean conscience. Their endeavour should aim at assuming the role of a moral guide and preceptor—a role which is in search of a hero in this country for quite some time. The Muslim India has to prepare itself for it as a sincere, God-fearing and well-meaning community not yielding to personal or parochial, partisan or communal interests and to raise itself above greed and self-advancement. Only a leadership possessing these qualities can save the country which has reached the brink of a moral-spiritual abyss. This is also the only way by which a depressed, backward community can elevate itself to the position of leadership and transform its critics into well-wishers.

There is another aspect of the character of Indian Muslims in which they have excelled their brethren elsewhere. I do not refer to it here in order to flatter myself but to point out a historical fact. And this is the impassioned affection of the Indian Muslims for the holy Prophet of Islam. It is indeed this ardent attachment of the Indian Muslims to the holy Prophet, Islam and the spiritual centre of their faith which has helped them, time and again, to steer their way clear from the troubled waters of many a social and cultural crisis and has thus saved them from losing their identity like several other peoples entering India earlier to make it their homeland. The Indian Muslims have always taken keen interest, particularly since the beginning of this century, in the affairs of other Muslim countries. The crusading zeal exhibited by the Indian Muslims (as well as Hindus) for the survival and integrity of the *Khilāfat* (Caliphate) is a befitting example of their tender feeling for their Muslim brethren abroad. It was this movement which launched the Hindus and Muslims upon a joint countrywide struggle for emancipation of the country from

foreign yoke. It is difficult to describe, in a few words, how this movement had created a sense of national unity and urge for freedom in the masses. Similarly, the Indian Muslims have never lagged behind in registring their feelings about the recovery of Palestine and *Masjid-i-Aqsā*, or, for that matter, any other problem confronting any part of the Muslim world. In truth and reality, the Indian Muslims have always been conscious of the difficulties and problems of their brothers abroad and their concern for them has never been guided by the least consideration of self-interest or reciprocity. This, really, is the inevitable result of their ardent attachment to their faith and their religious bent of mind which, by the way, finds expression in the innumerable religious institutions, *Maktabs* and *Madarsās*, dotted all over the length and breadth of the country. During the period of British rule these institutions had been designed to serve as strongholds of Indian Muslims against the foreign rule. Spread all over the country, thousands of these Arabic *Madarsās* provide instruction in the *Sihāh Sittah* with particular emphasis on *Sahīh Bukhārī*, *Sahīh Muslim*, *Jamʿe-Tirmizī* and *Sunan-i-Abū Dāʿūd*. All these books are taught word by word in these institutions unlike the selective study in the Arab or Islamic countries. Almost all these institutions are run under non-official aegis with the help of voluntary contributions. This country has ever had a large number of self-sacrificing *ʿUlamā*, leading a frugal yet contented life, engaged in teaching and preaching the religious disciplines in the most unostentatious manner. These *Madarsās* have been producing these modest and unaspiring servants of faith besides keeping alight the torch of faith and knowledge in this country.

It would not be out of place to mention here that the religious scholars of India were always in the forefront of the struggle for emancipation of the country from foreign yoke and, quite often, they even held the reins of these movements. Actually, if one were to go deeper and also be

just to them, one would find that the *'Ulamā* were the first to embark in this struggle as well as to impart the warmth and the strength and the mass appeal to it. They led the movement of *Jihad* or armed resistance to the British power in India, many of them fought pitched battles against the Imperial forces and sometimes won brilliant victories. A large number of them courted death in the battlefields, many were sentenced to transportation for life in Nicobar and Andaman Islands and Malta and not a few of them spent a considerable part of their lives in the prisons. In truth and reality, the story of India's struggle for freedom forms such an inseparable part of the history of Muslim religious leadership in this country that the one cannot be related without mentioning the other.

Another mark of distinction the *'Ulamā* of this country have to their credit relates to the leading role played by them in the development of Urdu language and literature. Almost all those who have given a genuine lustre to the popular literary style of Urdu were drawn from their ranks. The new form and style of Urdu given to it by the Muslim religious scholars imparted simplicity and naturalness to it which is stillits most valued possession. Many of these scholars were not only pioneers in creating new literary styles, but remain, to this day, unchallenged masters of prose and poetry. The researches made by them still constitute the sole authoritative source material for recounting the story of Urdu's development and the lives of its early precursors. We can, thus, assert that there has never been that feeling of strangeness between the Muslim religious disciplines and the literary tradition of this sub-continent which marks the relationship between the men of letters and religion in some of the Muslim countries and which, to be sure, is harmful in varying degrees to both of them.

If you permit me, I would humbly submit that the Indian Muslims have, to a large extent, made themselves self-sufficient in the matter of their faith. They seek light and

guidance from the noble character, ambitions, trials and sufferings of earliest precursors of Islam. They have hitched their ideals and ambitions not to any setting or rising star of an Arab or Muslim country but have linked their fate to the ever shining, radiant sun of Islam. They have refused to be led by others nor will they ever permit their allegiance to Islam being made subservient to the loyalty to any country or individual. They need the succour of God alone to stick to their decision. Whether any Muslim country, Arab or non-Arab, forsakes Islam or is enamoured by its dead, bygone culture or civilization, we in India shall, always, with the help of our Lord, be found firm and resolute in our faith in Islam, its great *Sharīʿah* and the solidarity of Muslim *Millat*. We refuse to strike any bargain at the cost of our Islamic creed and way of life. We are aware that we shall have to pay a heavy price, perhaps, in this country as well as elsewhere, for upholding our convictions. We shall have to deny ourselves many a benefit that automatically fall to the lap of people who are wedded to utilitarian principle as the code of their life, but we are confident that if we are successful in living up to our resolve, translate our decision into action with the best of our talents and abilities and our God is also not displeased with us, we shall not be a loser in the end. For we are convinced that the whole of this Universe alongwith its physical law of causation is subservient to the Will of God, we have opted for what a poet sang in these words :

I complain not if a few goblets are
estranged from me,
A thousand taverns would be mine, if the
Beloved casts a glance over me.

Therefore, for the afore-mentioned reasons, this country deserves more than any other Muslim country to host such a distinguished gathering of thinkers, men of letters, educationists and reputed teachers. You can now see for yourselves the fruit of efforts made by a poor section of your

great *Millat* for the propagation of its faith and religious learning. What else it has to do in this direction and what guidance can it receive from you is for you to indicate.

I deem it proper to welcome you again in this historic city of Lucknow which is not only known for its cultural refinement and its worthy sons, but which also vied with Delhi in the recent past as a centre of Indo-Islamic cultural attainments. As a city of poets and writers, Lucknow had been not very long before the centre of Muslim educational activities in this country and had produced eminent pedagogues whose name and fame attracted students from the farthest ends of the Islamic world. The world famous *Nizāmiā* curriculum was evolved in this very city which continued to be followed for a long time in the whole of this sub-continent as well as Afghanistan and Turkistan. This city has also the distinction of propagating and diffusing the Word of God by producing such a large number of *Huffāz* that no other city of the Islamic world can claim precedence over it. *This is the bounty of Allah; which he giveth unto whom He will, Allah is of infinite bounty.*

There is yet another honour enjoyed by this city and, for that reason, I offer our welcome to you once again, for the third time. It was in this city that a new leaf was turned over in the chapter of Islamic thought and educational endeavour in the recent past. In the beginning of the 14th century A.H. (by the close of 19th century A.D.) the Muslim India had, on the one hand, reached the nadir of intellectual apathy and, on the other, divisive, disintegrative forces had rent asunder its unity of thought and action. *'Ulamā* had ever been the guides of this community and it was their duty to solve the problems of the *Millat* but they were fast losing their hold over the Muslims owing, chiefly, to the then prevalent system of education in the traditional religious institutions. The educated class of Muslims in India had been divided into two distinct groups, one, consisting of those learned in religious lore, and, the other, comprising modern

educated class which had received education in the universities and colleges established on Western pattern. Both these groups were strangers to each other and the widening gulf of separation had divided them to an extent that no communication seemed possible except through an interpreter.

The problem was not confined to these two sections alone. Persons belonging to different juristic schools or religious factions among Muslims looked down upon one another either with fear or contempt. Polemical disputations were the order of the day which very often took a violent turn. Each one of these groups decried to other as having lapsed from faith. The curriculum of the religious institutions admitted no change while the religious scholars, generally static in outlook and leading a life isolated from the society, had closed their doors to every branch of modern education and research. There was an increasing tendency among the religious scholars to join the political movements abjuring their primary responsibility of guarding the portals of Muslim society against the onslaught of baneful influences of Western education. The newly-educated class had thus been left to the mercy of Western apologists and harbingers of intellectual apostasy.

It was during this critical period that a few thoughtful and well-intentioned scholars joined hands, in 1311 A.H./1893 A.D., to find a solution to the ills of their community. It was the first time when the *ʿUlamā* and the Western educated scholars, the *Hanafites* and the *Ahl-i-Hadīth*, the elites and the educationists had come together for a common purpose. They founded an Association and gave it the name of Nadwatul ʿUlamā for it had been set up at the instance of the religious scholars, and was also meant primarily to summon that class to take up its rightful place in the leadership of the Muslim community. The Association started its works with the avowed objectives of bringing about unity among different religious groups of

Muslims; making a coordinated effort for reforms in the social and educational fields so as to start a movement of renaissance among the Muslims; producing scholars of ability and character; inviting all right-thinking sections of Muslims to join hands for achieving common ends; remoulding the curriculm of traditional religious institutions in a way that was compatible with the spirit of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* as well as fully met the demands of changing times, raising the standard of religious instruction; and, preparing scholars who could win the respect and confidence of both the old and the modern educated classes.

The leaders of this Association paid particular attention to the study of the Qur'ān and its exegesis. They sorted out the discursive and religious disciplines to be taught in the religious institutions and identified the end and purpose of each branch of learning. The works of later-day writers found more appealing to religious imagination and intellectual trend of the time were, as a rule, given precedence over lifeless and pedantic creations of the medieval authors. A new methodology capable of imparting a better understanding of Arabic language and literature was substituted for the old out-dated method designed merely to read that language. The teaching of the Arabic language and literature had been neglected for a long time in the religious institutions. The new methodology adopted for its teaching re-asserted its importance as a living language which possessed vigour of thought and congruence with the present. The new curriculum thus sought to make Arabic the medium of instruction so that the students could express their ideas in it and make it a vehicle for propagation of their faith. The fundamental aim of these reforms was to enable the students to assimilate the grace and elegance of the Qur'ān and to enjoy the beauty of Prophetic Traditions as well as to acquire the ability of addressing the Arabs in their own language, for, in this manner alone could they stem the tide of rising storm of

disbelief and other misleading movements in their midst.

Strange though the emphasis on teaching of Arabic was in those days of practically very little means of communication and still fewer chances of contact between the Muslims of this country and the Arab lands, we can now very well appreciate the far-sightedness of those scholars. The Arab countries have since attained independence, delegations of one country visiting others and the international meets have thrown open the gates of frequent contact between the Muslims of India and the Arab world.

They also introduced some of the modern disciplines essential for religious scholars in their curriculum and provided for instruction in the then official language. In order to translate these ideals into action they established, in 1316 A.H./1898 A.D., the Darul 'Uloom Nadwatul 'Ulamā at Lucknow which has since come to be known, owing to its popularity, as the Nadwa which was actually the name of the Association running the institution. You shall be getting more details about the history of this Association and the achievements of the Darul ʿUloom in a report to be presented here.

Here, on the sprawling grounds of the Darul ʿUloom founded by an Association which was more of a school of thought and a reformatory movement than a mere centre of education, I greet you all with open hands. This is, of course, a historic occasion which, I am confident, will be remembered long with a sense of gratitude by all those who will inherit the sacred bequest of light and leaning from here. The distinguished gathering we have here today, representing the greater part of Islamic world, is, undoubtedly, a favour of the Lord, and an unparalleled event in this country. We, therefore, salute you, our honoured guests, again, in the name of Islam as well as its light and learning. Our people and our country have never been guilty of ingratitude. They have always looked upon it as a sacred duty to welcome and thank their guests and now, today,

when such a galaxy of eminent personages has assembled here, they feel elated at the honour bestowed on them. No words can express more befittingly their joy and gratitude than what a poet once said—

Like the (dead) earth I am, on which the vernal cloud
Sent down the rain of mercy.
If a hundred tongues were to grow on my body,
How could they offer thanks for the blessings,
like the lily !

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi
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